



Extended Antisemitism: The Case of Poznań

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11649/sn.2616>

Joanna Roszak

Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4203-8010>

e-mail: joanna.roszak@ispan.waw.pl

Abstract

This article examines contemporary antisemitism in Poznań. The first part of the study reconstructs how the contemporary collective memory in this Polish city was shaped, starting in the interwar period. Referring to earlier contexts, the author points to the founding myth of the medieval legend of the stolen Hosts, which prevails in Poznań. She also retraces the history of antisemitism at the Adam Mickiewicz University. In recent years, the university has disclosed archival records, including those connected with the introduction of ghetto benches and the *numerus clausus* rule, in this way attempting to atone for disgraceful events in its history. Reflecting on antisemitism in Poznań, the author asks what fuels it in the almost mono-ethnic city that Poznań is today, and introduces the term extended antisemitism. For the purposes of the article, she conducted interviews (using the Delphi technique) with researchers and social activists involved in Jewish issues.

Keywords: antisemitism in Poznań; extended antisemitism; postmemory; Delphi technique

This work was supported by the Polish Ministry of Education and Science.

No competing interests have been declared.

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/), which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. © The Author 2021.

How Concealment Gave Way to Reflection

On account of the centenary celebrations of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań,¹ in October 2019 Rector Andrzej Lesicki appointed the Commission for Investigating Cases of Persecution of People of Jewish Origin at the University before the Second World War. He stressed that “there also [had been] difficult and shameful moments in its [University’s – J. R.] past” (Szostak, 2020).² The idea for this interdisciplinary body was inspired by Maciej Zaremba Bielawski’s book entitled *Dom z dwiema wieżami* [A House with Two Turrets] (Zaremba Bielawski, 2018) and a letter signed among others by representatives of academic, artistic and journalistic circles in Poznań. It was an important step in acknowledging the antisemitic atmosphere that had built up there. To understand the embodiment of antisemitism in this city as it is today, I am going to reconstruct the climate that has built up in Poznań since the interwar period. To grasp this issue, we have to go back as far as the 1930s, when the shameful moments that Rector Lesicki referred to took place.

University records, with reports of Senate meetings and files of student organisations among them, provide insight into the mood of the period. In his speech opening the academic year 1936/37, Rector Stanisław Runge emphasised the national and religious composition of the students, stating that it “endowed” the university “with a certain specific character”: “It is a well-known fact that the University of Poznań is the most Polish university” (Mądry, 2020, p. 6). Also, a resolution of the Senate from late 1919 is quite telling in this context: Jews coming from the former Prussian Partition and taking their school leaving examinations there, were to be admitted to courses without any restrictions. But eventually, in 1923, the *numerus clausus* rule was supported at the university.

In the window of Dobski’s cafe, one of the most popular places in the city at that time – located in Fredry Street, called Paulikirchstraße until 1919, Pawła Street in 1919–1922, and An der Paulikirche under the Nazi occupation of 1939–1945 – there was a sign reading that dogs and Jews were not allowed to enter. More and more clinics refused to employ Jewish doctors. Also, the Warta Poznań football club stopped accepting Jews, and in 1938 the local branch of the Polish Football Association proposed the introduction of the *numerus nullus* rule, which meant a ban on Jewish members. In May 1937, the Lawyers’ Association barred Jews from membership. At the same time, Jews were excluded from working for the Polish Bank. In September 1936, Poles put up a sign which informed that Jews were not allowed to enter the beach on the Warta River in Puszczykowo near Poznań. In October the same year, the minister of religious denominations and public enlightenment, Wojciech Świątosławski, authorised university rectors to introduce ghetto benches. It had only been four years since Rector Stanisław

1 Founded in 1919 as the Piast University (Wszechnica Piastowska) and later operating as the University of Poznań.

2 Unless otherwise stated, the translations are provided by the author of the article.

Pawłowski had considered himself proud that the university in Poznań was “the most Polish university” in the country. In such an atmosphere, at the beginning of December 1935, Jewish students were beaten and removed from lecture halls. On 6 December, the rector received their memorial, and four days later – a resolution of the All-Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*). This brief overview of repressive actions in various spheres of social life is intended to introduce the reader to the topic of the long shadow of antisemitism in Poznań and its manifestations today.

In his recently published biography of Zygmunt Bauman,³ who was born in Poznań, the Polish journalist and writer Artur Domosławski recalls the words of his protagonist and Noach Lasman. Let us first hear the latter, a geologist and writer who died in Jerusalem but was born and raised in the Jewish community in Poznań. He left the city in 1939 and was one of the two Jews who returned there after the war, in 1948. The passage reads as follows:

Before the war, Lasman lived in Poznań, like Bauman; they studied at the same Berger Gymnasium.⁴ This is one of the ghostly places of the past, it is difficult to fit them into today's city tissue. Schoolmates and teachers stressed the negative attitude towards Jews. “‘They are parasites living off Poles’, they said”; this is one of Lasman's memories. (Domosławski, 2021, p. 24)

The biographer continues: “It happened once that scouts caught Lasman and forced him to take an oath that he would never use the blood of a child to make matzo” (Domosławski, 2021, p. 53). Lasman himself attributed the atmosphere at the Gotthilf Berger Gymnasium to prejudice acquired by his teachers and schoolmates at home, in the street and from the press. He also noted that those who had been harassing him, in their own opinion displayed patriotic behaviour.

Domosławski also quotes a passage from Bauman's memoirs:

[My] grandfather did not accept the difference between Poznań and Stupca.⁵ Whenever the weather permitted, he would go to the nearby Asnyk Square, where, sitting on a bench and smoking cigarettes one after another [...], he would watch passers-by and children [playing] in the sandpit. The local antisemites were too shocked by the sight of a Jew in a gaberdine to accost him or even sneer at him. In this city, practically free from Jews, a stronghold of the fiercely anti-Jewish National Democrats,⁶ an old man displaying his provincial Jewish traits without inhibitions was a spectre from another world. So he took daily walks without being harassed by anyone. I could not say the same about myself... (Domosławski, 2021, p. 30)

3 Artur Domosławski, *Wygnaniec: 21 scen z życia Zygmunta Baumana* [The Exile: 21 Scenes from the Life of Zygmunt Bauman] (Domosławski, 2021).

4 It was founded in 1920 by Gotthilf Berger, Edward Raczyński and Hipolit Cegielski, in place of a German-language school.

5 A small town and local administrative centre 74 kilometres from Poznań.

6 National Democracy (*Narodowa Demokracja*, *Endecja*) – a Polish political movement with roots in the nineteenth century, promoting the vision of strong Poland, independent of foreign influences.

The biographer reconstructs the realities of the Bauman family life in pre-war Poznań:

In March 1932, in Kórnik near Poznań, local nationalists switched from words to deeds: they incited anti-Jewish riots. [...] One of the instigators of violence was the local parish priest, who, shortly before the attack, had published an article entitled "Śwój do swego po swoje" [meaning "We buy in shops of our own", i.e. Polish] in the parish newspaper. In Poznań, nationalists painted slogans on the walls of buildings owned by Jews [...]. They organised blockades of Jewish shops to discourage customers from shopping there. [...] The boycott of the Jewish community was promoted by the Green Ribbon League (Liga Zielonej Wstążki), created especially for agitation purposes. The league members, often recruited from students, pinned green ribbons to their clothes and called for the creation of "Poland without Jews". (Domosławski, 2021, p. 50)

At the time when thirteen-year-old Zygmunt received his primary school leaving certificate, that is, in June 1938, the daily *Kurier Poznański* [Poznań Courier] warned that "the number of Jews in Poznań [was] seriously increasing". The author of the pamphlet continued: "In 1931 there were 1,883 [Jews in Poznań], now there are 3,500". Domosławski comments: "Pre-war Poznań was a bastion of nationalist ideology. Polish nationalism had been shaped in the last decades of the partitions, and in the region of Greater Poland it had a predominantly anti-German edge. [...] And so the Jew was presented as the fourth invader, who seized a nation without a state from within, ate both hearts and brains in it" (Domosławski, 2021, p. 46). To exemplify the antisemitic atmosphere of interwar Poznań, Domosławski uses the notes he received from Professor Bauman, which he had prepared for his daughters:

Two current holders of the privilege of hunting me, teenage scoundrels [...], were already waiting at the station. One of them was tall and slightly stooped, resembling a stealthy thief. The other was athletic and had the low forehead [...]. The four of us travelled from school. [...] my mother's presence did not affect their behaviour. They scrupulously performed everything that belonged to the usual rite, and they made sounds that I knew well in the correct order. I glanced at my mother – she was holding my hand tightly, but she somehow curled up and, staring at the pavement, avoided looking at our escort. It dawned on me suddenly: my almighty and omniscient mother was unable to protect me [...]! From then on, I lived in fear for years. (Domosławski, 2021, p. 43)

That was the moment Bauman realised his position in the oncoming struggle – he had lost his status of a boy protected by his mother. The mother's authority would not protect him either from the physical attack, or from anti-Jewish phantasms and the miasma of violence and hate. The short walk became a turning point that would divide his life in two; in the latter part, he was supposed to be a Jew, physically defenceless, but drawing strength from his studies.

Lasman was not wrong in saying that his oppressors could have taken their prejudices against Jews from the press. Several antisemitic magazines were issued in interwar Poznań. Let us review their titles only, as they build an imaginary Jewless future of the city: *Potęga Polski bez Żydów* [The Power of Poland without Jews], *Strażnica Harcerska* [Scouts'

Watchtower], *Samoobrona Narodu* [Self-Defence of the Nation], *Pokrzywy* [Nettles], *Bez Pardonu* [No Pardon], *Pod Pręgierz* [In the Pillory], *Pajk* [Spider], *Orędownik* [Spokesman]. They pillared to the fear that the Jewish inhabitants felt every day: Zygmunt Bauman confessed that he had been afraid to go out to the school yard (Roszak, 2015, p. 35), and Baruch Bergman⁷ told me: "Antisemitism in Poznań was insane. Not a day went by I wasn't insulted" (Roszak, 2015, p. 42). Even Krystyna Piotrowska⁸, who was then unrecognised by her interlocutors as Jewish, mentioned antisemitic comments freely voiced "by representatives of the artistic and academic elite in Poznań" (Roszak, 2015, p. 64).

Wara żydom od progów Poznania

„Pod Pręgierz” gromi żydów i żydofilów już czternaste lat.

Czternaste lat naszej pracy na gruncie poznańskim, to okres ciągłej walki, walki nieugiętej, bez pardonu, walki mozolnej, bo często trudniejszej przez rodaków, Polaków nie rozumiejących, albo nie chcących zrozumieć konieczności odzyskania naszego kraju.

Nie będziemy się szczegółowo i obszernie rozwodzić nad przeszłością i działalnością naszego pisma, albowiem nie czas po temu i do jubileuszu jeszcze daleko. Chodzi nam w tym wypadku o zupełnie inną sprawę: o krótki szkic naszej działalności na terenie Poznania i Zachodniej Polski, na tle budzącego się dziś powszechnie ruchu odzyskaniowego.

Nie tak dawno to lata, gdy w innych dzielnicach Polski żyd należał do codzienności, do normalnego widoku, który wcale nie raził. Myślano po prostu, że inaczej być nie może. W Poznaniu było jednak inaczej. „Tu żyd, a jednak nie polski” żyd, brudny, cuchnący i wstrętny należał do rzadkości. Poznań słył i słynie z wstrętu do żydów i dla tego jest miastem, gdzie polskość dominuje, miastem, na którego wierności i nieugiętości Polska zawsze może polegać. Dziś nareszcie i w innych dzielnicach kraju żydostwo doczekało się właściwej oceny. Polska zaczyna pojmować, że żyd nigdy nie był i nie będzie Polakiem, że jest jednostką uciążliwą i szkodliwą, że wszelkimi sposobami

mi trzeba do tego dążyć, by go się z Polski pozbyć.

Żydostwo tymczasem, pędzone przez budzące się z odrętwienia społeczeństwo polskie, ze zdwojoną natarczywością rzuca się na naszą dzielnicę, atakując tę niezdobytą dotychczas twierdzę polskości i ostoję chrześcijańskiego przemysłu, handlu i rzemiosła. Poznań stawia opór, broni swego dobytku, strzeże czystości i nieskazitelności, dba o uczciwość i etykę w życiu gospodarczym – słowem chce nadal zachować charakter i opinię miasta bez żydów. I tu dopiero uwydatnia się owocna działalność naszego pisma na terenie Poznania.

„Pod Pręgierz” w ciągu swych czternastu lat istnienia, zdziałał bardzo dużo, nie posługując się szumną reklamą ani nie goniąc za pochwałami i wyrazami uznania. Poznań był jesł i będzie miastem niecierpiącym żydów, lecz zawsze w murach jego można znaleźć garstkę takich, dla których słowo „pieniądz” ma więcej uroku i wartości niż słowo „honor”, „godność Polaka”, „Ojczyzna” i „dobro narodu”. Takim właśnie jednostkom i im podobnym żydofilom, wypowiedział „Pod Pręgierz” zdecydowaną walkę.

Mimo nieprzychylnych nastrojów społeczeństwa poznańskiego, powstawały i powstają wciąż jeszcze w Poznaniu i na prowincji żydowskie placówki gospodarcze. Z nimi to prowadzimy od czternastu lat walkę, demaskując każdą próbę osiedlenia się żydów, zważając



Pręgierz: Ja nie żonę! Brzwiami łeb ci twój przytrzasnę!

Fig. 1. Antisemitic graphics in *Pod Pręgierz* [In the Pillory], depicting the editor of the magazine as a law enforcement officer who slams a Jew in the door, 1937. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

I claim that a basic anti-Jewish stereotype already alive in the pre-war Poznań still fuels antisemitic feelings today. In the interviews which I included in my book *Słyszysz? Synagoga. Wychodząc spod poznańskiej synagogi przy Wronieckiej* [Can you hear? A Synagogue: Coming out of the Synagogue in Wroniecka Street in Poznań], the topic of antisemitism returns regularly. In 2016, it was discussed to sell the former synagogue building at the corner

⁷ Polish Jew, born in Poznań in 1925, died in the United States in 2021; Holocaust survivor.

⁸ Polish contemporary artist, born 1948 in Warsaw.

of Wroniecka and Stawna Streets and there were plans to build a hotel with a swimming pool on the site (Lehmann, 2019). The Jewish community completed the sale in 2019. However, the community had already compromised itself by collaborating with a fake rabbi: the man who introduced himself as Jakob ben Nistell was the face of the Jewish community in Poznań for several years. He participated in important religious ceremonies, sometimes with an imam and a Catholic priest; in 2014 he took part in the ceremony of the unveiling of the lapidarium in Wronki, celebrated Kaddish (not knowing the Hebrew language), met with young people, and talked about Judaism. The “rabbi from Haifa” turned out to be a Jacek Niszczota from Ciechanów. Both of these circumstances – using the services of a fake rabbi and selling the synagogue – sparked the antisemitic feeling lurking beneath, awakening an anti-Jewish stereotype so much present in pre-war Poznań, as I have already shown.

Another factor that fuels this stereotype is the long-lasting Roman Catholic tradition of presenting Jews as a threat to the safety of Christians. As it is today, the Catholic hierarchy in Poznań consents to antisemitic attitudes and to the fostering of a paranoid view of reality (Cała, 2012). This is well visible in the case of the reissue of Mieczysław Noskowicz’s memoirs. His work *Trzy Święte Hostyje w Poznaniu* [Three Holy Hosts in Poznań] popularised the antisemitic medieval founding legend about the profanation of the Hosts in Poznań, already described by Jan Długosz in his *Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae* (Długosz, 2001). In some versions, the act was committed by a poor woman and her daughter. The three Hosts were allegedly profaned in 1399 on the site of today’s Sanctuary of the Most Holy Blood of Christ in Żydowska Street.⁹ According to the legend, they were stolen and desecrated with knives; when the perpetrators found out that they were dealing with holiness, they threw the Hosts into a well. I draw an outline of the story about the profanation following Rafał Witkowski, the author of the book *Żydzi w Poznaniu* [The Jews in Poznań]:

On Friday, 15 August 1399, the Jews of Poznań allegedly profaned the Hosts, having bribed a woman to steal them from the Dominican church [today the church at Żydowska/Kramarska St. – J. R.] and sell them [attempts to bury and drown the Hosts in a well and a swamp allegedly failed – J. R.]. On the spot where the Hosts were allegedly found, on the meadows outside the town, King Władysław Jagiełło founded the Corpus Christi Church and the Carmelite monastery [today in Krakowska Street – J. R.]. For centuries, the monks promoted the cult of the Eucharist but the legend itself was popularised only in 1609 by Tomasz Treter in his Latin book entitled *Sacratissimi Corporis Christi historia et miracula*, translated into Polish in 1772. (Witkowski, 2012, pp. 20–21)

Until 2005, in the church built on the site there was a plaque concerning this tale. The story, contained in Noskowicz’s memoirs, was available in the parish shop in the Corpus Christi Church. The removal of the memorial plaque can hardly be considered an act of

⁹ In the Middle Ages – Sukiennicza Street; then, until 1919 – Judenstrasse. For most of its history, the name of the street reflected its connection with Jewish residents and the proximity of synagogues.

cleansing oneself of the sin of antisemitism: it was replaced with a large printed note placed at the entrance, and the above-mentioned antisemitic writings were disseminated.



Fig. 2. The vault of the Church of the Most Holy Blood of Christ in Poznań with an antisemitic painting by Adam Swach, depicting caricatured Jews piercing the Hosts; photo by Joanna Roszak.

If the institution that relies so much of the practice of atonement, the Roman Catholic Church, did not admit to its sins, what does it look like in the case of Poznań University? The university started to acknowledge and atone for such disgraceful events in its history as the ones described in the introductory passages of this article. There are also examples of civil atonement: offensive antisemitic inscriptions on the walls in the streets of the city are painted over by activists, schoolchildren and students, for instance as part of the campaign called “Paint Over Hate, HejtStop” (Zamaluj hejty, HejtStop) in November 2013. However, this does not change the fact that we deal here in Poznań with ongoing antisemitism and, furthermore, a case of antisemitism without Jews (cf. Beller, 2007; Darnton, 1981; Lendvai, 1971). While reflecting on this issue, I have posed the question of what it is fuelled by today in this, in principle, almost mono-ethnic city.

The awakening of antisemitism requires renewed research on its contemporary incarnation. By writing this article, I do not want to repeat thoughts that have already been articulated many times: about inherited ignorance, about the disappointment caused by Polish education, which still does not attach sufficient importance to equality and

increasingly exposes young people to indoctrination, about the terrifying balance of actions that save memory and those that distort it, about the current historical policy that fuels hatred, about the deflation of many notions, about the oblivion imposed upon the women and men of Poznań over the years. I decided to talk to social activists and researchers who are devoted to the restoration of the memory of Jews from Poznań. Using the Delphi technique, I conducted interviews with four of them on the topic of antisemitism in the city today. They are quoted and discussed on the following pages.

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir refers to antisemitism without Jews as exhaustive or ritualistic, "as the curses that Poles use as interruptions are ritualistic" (Tokarska-Bakir, 2008, p. 7). She discusses the ritualism of antisemitism without Jews and the unverified faith based on prejudice (Tokarska-Bakir, 2008, pp. 7, 46, 49), as well as structural antisemitism (Tokarska-Bakir, 2008, p. 51), correlated with secondary antisemitism discussed above. In her study *Antysemityzm: Niezamknięta historia* [Antisemitism: An Open History], Bożena Keff stresses that antisemitism is not a view: "it has no cognitive, intellectual or moral value" (Keff, 2013, p. 10). In the days when the door is being opened more and more widely to this "non-view" propagated by those infected with hate, in the days when the conviction of the unclosed history of antisemitism is becoming clearer, I propose the term used in the title of this article. Extended antisemitism becomes an element of the fight for memory and an attempt to weaken those researchers, activists and experts who restore or resuscitate the memory of Polish Jews. Sometimes they are affected by stigmatisation, verbal and physical violence. These behaviours are extended to them as an analogue of the discriminatory actions that have become the fate of Jews.

In 1960, at the beginning of his essay entitled "The Anti-Semitism of Kind and Gentle People" ("Antysemityzm ludzi łagodnych i dobrych") Tadeusz Mazowiecki quoted Ludwik Hirsztfeld's words from *The Story of One Life (Historia jednego życia)*: "The greatest tragedy of Jews is not that the anti-Semite hates them, but that the good, gentle people say: 'He is a decent man, even though he is Jewish'" (Mazowiecki, 1960/2017, p. 172). Further on, he continued as follows:

After all, this problem appears to be quite different in Poland today than it was in the inter-war years. And this is the first general claim that is impossible to ignore when setting out to analyze this issue. The phenomenon of open, militant anti-Semitism has disappeared from the surface of our life. There are no organizations that programmatically proclaim racism and anti-Semitism. The state has taken a different stance and treats both these ideologies as hostile to humanity and prohibited by law. (Mazowiecki, 1960/2017, p. 172)

In contrast, today, sixty one years after Mazowiecki's remarks, antisemitic offences and crimes that are driven by antisemitism, as well as organisations promoting them, have again become part of the everyday Polish landscape. "Fanatics and heirs of fascism", "militant anti-Semites, a discussion with whom is pointless" voice their views in public debate, together with those who were central to Mazowiecki's argument: "ordinary people [...], the kind and gentle people who say 'He is a decent man, even though he is Jewish'" (Mazowiecki, 1960/2017,

p. 173). Katarzyna Kuczyńska-Koschany, one of my interlocutors, heard the phrase “decent people, but Jews” in her childhood on a daily basis (Roszak, 2015, p. 67).

Contempt for activities preserving the memory of Polish Jews, which revives in public circulation, becomes a challenge for those engaged. Aleida Assmann aptly observes that the official memory ends with the vitality of the authority that supports it (Assmann, 2011, p. 106). As it is today, the official memory related to the current Polish government’s historical policy is working on strengthening the miasmas and creating an image of Other (refugees, people with disabilities, women) as unworthy of Poland, and at the same time – as a threat to its imaginary values.

And are there truly so many actions carried out when it comes to the memory of the Jewish inhabitants of Poznań? In recent years, Jewish heritage tours have been organised in the city, and long-standing concealment of the topic has given way to reflection. Researchers and social activists have been mapping successive sites in Poznań that are associated not only with the memory of the martyrdom of Jews – including the Edmund Szyk Stadium, Lake Rusałka and Lake Malta, which were built partly by Jewish prisoners from forced labour camps (Smykowski & Wosińska, 2012; Sobańska & Wojciechowska, 2012) – but also with the memory of their lives, including Poznań synagogues, the Jewish cemetery in Głogowska Street (with Akiva Eger’s grave), Irena Sendlerowa Square and Akiva Eger Square. There are also many initiatives popularising Jewish history and culture. The magazine *Miasteczko Poznań* [Shtetele Poznań] has been issued since 2003, and the “Miasteczko Poznań” Association (Stowarzyszenie “Miasteczko Poznań”) has organised debates, meetings with authors, seminars and exhibitions since 2009. The Simchat Chajim Festival offers a journey through the multicultural past of the region, the website Chaim/Życie [Life], a project led by Andrzej Niziołek, collects information on local Jews, and the Tu Żyli Żydzi [Jews Used to Live Here] Foundation, established in 2020 by Niziołek together with Hana Lasman, initiates scholarly and popularising events and organises tours and meetings of Polish and Israeli youth.

Not only Polish activists and artists become the target of extended antisemitism, as the case of the sculpture of Golem shows. Designed by Czech artist David Černý, and placed at Marcinkowski Avenue in 2010 (to remind us that Loew ben Bezalel, the creator of the golem, was born in Poznań about 1520), it suffered serious damage already a year later and was knocked over by vandals in 2012.

I evoke the figure of the golem as it shows the basic entanglement of antisemitism through the ages. According to legend, Rabbi Loew brought a golem to life when antisemitic attacks intensified in Prague. He moulded a giant out of clay and had the power to bring him to life so that he could defend the threatened Jews. When he wanted to do this, he would write the word *Emet* (“truth” in Hebrew) on the creature’s forehead; and to put him to sleep, he would erase the first letter (the Hebrew *met* means “death”). We also move between these poles – truth and death, the retention and the destruction of memory.



Fig. 3. Sculpture of Golem, designed by David Černý; Poznań, Marcinkowski Avenue, May 2021; photo by Joanna Roszak.

Extended Antisemitism

Investigating today's antisemitism in Poznań, I have asked researchers and social activists involved in the topic whether to some limited and approximate extent they share the fate of those they devote their efforts to. This is what I would call extended antisemitism, aimed at this milieu and at these individuals. In the interview questionnaire I prepared for this article, there was a question about whether my interlocutors had experienced antisemitism and what they thought it was fuelled by today. Also, at the end of the interview, I asked them whether, in their opinion, Poznań used to be and still remained in any way different from other cities.

Professor Katarzyna Kuczyńska-Koschany, the author of the study “Все поэты жи́ды”: *Antytotalitarne gesty poetyckie i kreacyjne wobec Zagłady oraz innych doświadczeń granicznych* [“All Poets Are Jews”: Anti-Totalitarian Poetic Acts and Acts of Creativity Towards the Holocaust and Other Borderline Experiences] and a founder of the “Dabru Emet” Academic Society of Jewish Culture and Literature Enthusiasts, told me as follows:

I would call antisemitism in Poznań an empty phenomenon or a phenomenon “without properties”. In the Middle Ages, Poznań had the largest Jewish community in Poland. At the time, the Jews of Poznań took an active part in creating the prosperity of the city (Rabbi Akiva Eger cared for the sick people during the plague – regardless of their religion and origin). At the beginning of the twentieth century they built a beautiful and impressive synagogue here (which was turned into a swimming pool for the Germans during the occupation).

Recently, the lack of memory or the occasional memory has begun to be opposed by courageous civic thinking, which means [such initiatives and projects as]: a backward walk from the cathedral to the synagogue; preserving the *matzevot*¹⁰ from the bottom of Lake Rusałka; lighting the Star of David on the water surface in the [synagogue / swimming pool] building in Wroniecka Street (a project designed by Janusz Marciniak); walks around Jewish Poznań (“Miasteczko Poznań” Association); articles and talks about Poznań Jews (Andrzej Niziołek, Zbigniew Pakuła, Joanna Roszak, Rafał Witkowski, as well as the Barak Kultury [Barrack of Culture] Association, the “Dabru Emet” Society at Adam Mickiewicz University, the Łazęga Poznańska [Poznań Rambler] Association). The poets made protrusions in the emptiness (*wypustki w pustkach*) left by the Poznań Jews, but the common awareness of the city’s inhabitants is still lethargic.

Kuczyńska-Koschany refers to Poznań’s antisemitic past embedded in its space: a synagogue that was turned into a swimming pool during the war and performed this function even in the twenty-first century. She feels wounded by the lethargy of most of the city’s inhabitants, but at the same time notices the redoubled efforts of a group of activists and researchers to educate local people. In this way, she sees this education as the key to repairing the world (*tikkun olam*).¹¹

Furthermore, my interlocutor recalls Ryszard Krynicki’s quatrain “Miasto” [The City], based on a well-known Polish stereotype, where the poet uses the periphrasis of Poznań as the city of order and cleanliness. This is why here the synagogue and the Jewish cemetery were erased. For many years, Poznań – its inhabitants, including city officials – cleared the memory of the city’s Jewish past, which appeared to be uncomfortable.

The interview with Rafał Rosół, professor at the Institute of Classical Philology at the Adam Mickiewicz University and co-tutor of the “Dabru Emet” Academic Society of Jewish Culture and Literature Enthusiasts, led him to reflect on “stadium antisemitism”, an issue to which he devoted his book entitled *Chorągiewki z tałesu: Piłka nożna, antysemityzm i Zagłada* [Corner Flags of Tallith: Football, Antisemitism and the Holocaust] (to be published in 2022):

¹⁰ *Matzeva* – Hebrew ‘tombstone’, a stone pillar erected on elevated ground beside a sacrificial altar.

¹¹ *Tikkun olam* – Hebrew ‘repair of the world’.

The stadium antisemitism of Poznań football fans is directed, as in many other cities in Poland, against Widzew Łódź. In particular, the chants of Poznań fans during the match between the two teams in 2013 got a lot of publicity. The following chants could be heard from the stands: "Jazda z Żydami, Kolejorz – jesteście z wami" [Get out of here, Jews! Kolejorz – we are with you; *Kolejorz* is a dialectal term for the Lech Poznań sports club] and "Waszym domem Auschwitz jest, cała Polska o tym wie, że Czerwona Armia ta cała pójdzie do pieca" [Auschwitz is your home, the whole of Poland knows that the whole Red Army will go in the furnace; *Red Army* is a customary term for Widzew supporters; it refers to the club's colours].

In recent years the antagonism between the supporters of these teams has become even more intense, despite the fact that Widzew plays in a lower division and there are no direct matches. This is because Lech supporters have struck up a friendship with ŁKS Łódź fans, which is one of the reasons why graffiti against Widzew, including antisemitic graffiti, can now be seen in the streets of the capital of Greater Poland. For example, a tenement building in 28 June 1956 Street, housing a post office, now bears the well-known abbreviation "ŚŻK", meaning "Śmierć Żydzowskiej K***wie" [Death to Jewish-Widzew b*tch]. For fans in our country, "Żydzew" [compound noun: Pol. *Żydzi* 'Jews', plus *Widzew*] is a generally known transformation of the name "Widzew". In addition, the Star of David was inserted between the letters "R" and "S", which refers to "RTS", Widzew's customary name. It is the now unofficial abbreviation for "Robotnicze Towarzystwo Sportowe" [Workers' Sports Society].

Despite the friendship between Lech and ŁKS supporters, in late 2019 – at the match between these teams in the stadium in Bułgarska Street [in Poznań] – I myself heard how a supporter standing behind me sang "as a joke": "Łódź to jest wioska, wioska typowo żydowska" [Łódź is a village, a typical Jewish village].

The statement illustrates the growing threat: the increase of violence, from seemingly innocent word games to clear aggression, reflected in the chant about the furnace, and to acts of vandalism and physical violence. Rosó's book, which focuses on contemporary antisemitism, will be – to use a football metaphor – a yellow card from the researcher to contemporary, unsettled observers. Anyone familiar with Gordon Allport's Scale of Prejudice and Discrimination will read this book with fear. It illustrates well the unfinished history of antisemitism, and presents how the antisemitic miasma penetrated a field seemingly free from ethnic stereotypes. Such attitudes are not neutral and they lead to violence. And violence – actual or phantasmatic – starts with words. Antisemitism in Poland turns out to be constant, but constant are also efforts to build vivid memory about Jewish neighbours. This manifests itself in the memories and comments of the people I am writing about.

Przemysław Prasnowski, the founder of the "Barak Kultury" [Barrack of Culture] Association, shared with me his memories of the Tzadik Festival, held in Poznań and organised by the Multikulti Association (the first edition took place in 2007). He experienced antisemitism directly during Lena Piękniewska's concert:

She sang Jewish songs embedded in the history of Poznań, and it took place in a courtyard in Dominikańska Street, in the former Jewish district. It was a great idea, but, at one point, quite large stones started flying towards us from the neighbouring yard over the wall. I still

remember this feeling of danger. My wife and I were sitting in one of the first rows. It's a miracle that no one was hurt. I think it was not just an act of hooliganism.

It [antisemitism] affected me indirectly again a few years ago, when I organised a meeting with Ewa Kuryluk. When we, as "Barak Kultury", started to promote the event, we received some very unfavourable opinions, such as "Why have you invited this Jewess, she is a waste of time and money". I felt very sorry and ashamed for these people, who are, after all, residents of my city. Today, when, unfortunately, there are hardly any Jews left in Poland, Polish antisemitism feeds on frustration; I can't explain it any other way. Someone who has failed in life is looking for the reason for their failures.

The figure of the Jew is perfect to blame for everything that is unpleasant. Certainly, this is somehow handed down from generation to generation. Before the war, however, there was a logical explanation for this because Poles and Jews lived side by side, and the slogan "Your streets, our tenements" [Pol. *Wasze ulice, nasze kamienice*] translated into antisemitic behaviour such as spitting behind Jews passing by. Nowadays, street actions that are organised by right-wing circles against the Jews who demand the return of property seized during the war have some snippet of such emotions. I have seen such actions in Kraków and Poznań. They consist in collecting signatures and shouting antisemitic slogans while doing this.

I don't think Poznań stands out somehow from other Polish cities. Poznań under the current administration is a city open to Others and is fighting against the signs of discrimination. There were no such shameful actions as burning a Jewish effigy in the market square in Wrocław or building a gallows for a Jew in Łódź.

Prasnowski quotes the slogan "Your streets, our tenements", referring to the stereotypical competition between Jewish and non-Jewish residents, the monopolisation of lucrative branches of the economy and conspiratorial efforts to master the culture. However, he also points out other long-lasting memories of Jewish presence in Poznań, such as the history of Lake Rusałka, an artificial body of water formed in 1943 by the damming of the Bogdanka River, where the work was partly done by Jewish prisoners. Lately, the lake began to "give back" the *matzevot* with which its bottom had been laid. Thanks to the efforts of the activists, a plaque informing about the history of this place was put up on the shore. Prasnowski also says that "[t]he figure of the Jew is perfect to blame for everything that is unpleasant. Certainly, this is somehow handed down from generation to generation" – antisemitism becomes a phenomenon that can be inherited. Lasman, whom I quote above, had similar observations.

My next interlocutor was Andrzej Niziołek, a co-author of the book entitled *Fira. Poznańscy Żydzi: Opowieść o życiu* [Fira. Jews from Poznań: A Story About Life],¹² a tour guide specialising in the history of Poznań Jews, and a co-founder of the Tu Żyli Żydzi Foundation. He described two events, both of them true (however, the former was complemented by imagination):

I was showing a group around the city. We arrived at the Jewish tenement building at the corner of Szewska and Stawna Streets. I took some photos out of my bag and began

12 Fira Melamedzon-Salańska, a Poznań resident from a merchant family; she emigrated to Jerusalem in 1939.

to tell the story. One floor above us were the windows of Dawid Sonnabend's flat, the last hazzan¹³ of Poznań. He was short and rounded, dignified with a thick moustache and a musketeer's beard.

They were sitting at dinner and discussing Izi's alarming letter – he wrote that he had jaundice – when a crowd arrived. First they heard some tumult. Żejmi ran to the window, followed by one of the students renting a room from the hazzan. The noise was getting louder, so the others left their plates, the chairs scraped across the floor.

The people were walking from the synagogue, not yet visible. The street was narrow, not long, and on the way they also went past an orphanage for boys and a mikvah. They shouted, getting closer and closer: "Down with the Jews, Get out scabs, To Madagascar, Poland for the Poles"... You could hear windows being smashed.

Then the crowd overflowed from around the corner, mostly men in hats, peaked caps and workers' caps. It was led by several young people in student caps. They seemed to be coming from Plac Wolności [Liberty Square], from some rally but they were not satisfied enough. But what was our fault this time?

The stones first hit the windows of the tenement opposite, inhabited entirely by Jews. The crowd started banging on the door leading to their staircase. Frieda, terrified, grabbed Nafi and forcibly pulled him out of the living room. She called Żejmi and Rosi but they didn't move from the window. "It's a pogrom!", the *vater* shouted. "Get away from the windows."

They didn't make it. One of the stones hit the middle window and rolled under the table with the sound of breaking glass. Splinters of glass scattered on Rafi and Zali Szezar. They all jumped away but the shouting ripped into the living room through the broken window. There was no barrier to hatred. Adi heard that shouting forever. "There were no victims but there was a lot of damage," he said later.

I was telling the story of Izi when a slightly drunk dosser started shouting: "There were no Jews here! What the f*** are you talking about? These streets are Polish! There were no Jews here!" I told him not to disturb us. I threatened him that I'd call the police! It was an empty threat, both he and I knew it. He stood there shouting his words. The four participants joined in, also helpless. There was no one among us who would use a fist. To walk away meant to run away; he would follow us. To leave him? When his bottle got empty, he would perhaps go away. "So Izi...", I started, but I was already thrown off the story. And so were the people; someone kept trying to answer him. He shouted insults for a few more minutes, finally got bored. He disappeared.

I often wonder, when I'm showing tourists around, how many of those who stop by and then move on are simply not interested in the subject – and how many are cultural antisemites. Left alone, antisemitism spreads from generation to generation by osmosis. Words are always effective tinder. Words are always at hand and whoever needs them for their "business" unceremoniously makes use of them. Because they can. There are hardly any real Jews around us – but there is no shortage of "new Jews": LGBT people, "gender", immigrants.

Apart from that situation, I haven't experienced antisemitism. I didn't feel that it was directed against me. But I imagine it could easily happen. This broad interest in Jewish problems is still alive. I see it myself after my tours – people who often really don't know

13 Jewish musician who leads the people gathered in the synagogue in songful prayer.

anything, have become soaked with stereotypes, but because there are no Jews, they are curious about them and open to them. And then perhaps more and more interested, since many return to take more tours to learn more. This should be borne in mind when talking about the vitality of Polish antisemitism and its viability today. Because there is also the other side, just as viable already, and hopefully permanently. Maybe even more vital in the long run?

In his opinion, antisemitism in Poland is nourished by abandonment: "Passivity has dominated the individual social attitudes of Poles en bloc for several decades. First of all, it stems from the lack of systemic education", he added. What could be seen as a remedy is peace education. Niziołek is convinced that since there are no Jews here, Polish antisemitism feeds on cultural heritage, not on reality. He calls it "the most dignified racism and xenophobia". Left alone, antisemitism spreads from generation to generation by osmosis. Peace education classes in Poland could impact the social and psychological life of children and young people. Defined as a process of assimilating values and knowledge, building capacity and learning harmonious behaviors, peace education is a social opportunity to sustain the building of a civil society. It is of key importance both in countries which function harmoniously and those where human rights are violated.

Two of my interlocutors support the "Dabru Emet" Academic Society (in English *Dabru Emet* means "Speak the Truth"); Professor Kuczyńska-Koschany founded it and gave it a name that repeats the name of the document signed in 2000 and published in *The New York Times*.¹⁴ It is worth mentioning that the name includes the word written on the golem's forehead: *Emet* ("Truth"). All my interlocutors make every effort to ensure that the truth about the Jewish inhabitants of Poznań is heard. They initiate scholarly and artistic events, and when necessary they react to manifestations of racism. Thus, their activities, which involve work for knowledge and memory, have the hallmarks of work for peace.

"Все поэты жи́ды" ("All poets are Jews") – wrote Marina Tsvetaeva. The formula by the Russian poet seems to apply also to those who are involved in Jewish topics. Each of the educators, researchers and social activists runs the risk of being threatened in public space. The resentment towards Jews seems to be the quintessence of contemporary discrimination, its founding story, a kind of matrix for the paradigm of xenophobia, racism or harassment. In their activities as writers, researchers, social activists and educators, my interlocutors try to find a remedy for harassment and exclusion, both in the past and the present. They oppose antisemitism with courage and imagination. An analysis of the views of four social activists and researchers involved in Jewish issues, obtained thanks to the interviews conducted using the Delphi technique, allows us to see contemporary manifestations of antisemitism in Poznań.

14 It concerns working together for peace in the context of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

Antisemitism in Poznań: An Open History

A study of the forms of contemporary antisemitism in Poland conducted by Michał Bilewicz, Mikołaj Winiewski and Mirosław Kofta sketches psychological processes that determined the attitude of Poles towards Jews. The researchers discuss the role of the Jew as a scapegoat. They associate this mechanism with the frustration of antisemites resulting from the failure to achieve their own goals and from professing prejudicial ideologies (Bilewicz et al., 2011, p. 61). The authors refer to the incarnations of antisemitism that are reflected also in this article, namely: (1) traditional antisemitism, where Jews are seen as those responsible for Christ's death, which is the rarest form of this prejudice in contemporary Poland (the medieval legend of the stolen Hosts, which prevails in Poznań); (2) modern, conspirational antisemitism: hostility resulting from jealousy over the alleged influence of Jews in the sphere of economy or politics (activities of antisemitic magazines in Poznań) (Krzemiński, 2015); (3) secondary antisemitism, that is, denying one's own antisemitism, perceiving Jews as guilty of the Holocaust (antisemitic slogans of similar content appearing regularly on the walls of the former Poznań synagogue) (Bergmann & Erb, 1991).

Zygmunt Bauman recalled the words of Julian Tuwim, according to whom to be a Pole means to hate Polish antisemitism more than antisemitism of other societies. In my perspective: to be a local activist or a researcher in Poznań means to hate Poznań's antisemitism more than any other, and to engage in the research carried out here and in the grassroots commemorative and educational activities that constitute a counter-balance in Poznań. They are based on the assumption that these memory endeavours are epigenetic to the city and its inhabitants, and that they will be recorded in its tissue more effectively than the attitudes of those who fight the phantasmatic enemy.

References

- Assmann, A. (2011). *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*. C. H. Beck.
- Beller, S. (2007). *Antisemitism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Bergmann, W., & Erb, R. (1991). *Antisemitismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Ergebnisse der empirischen Forschung von 1946–1989*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-91415-6>
- Bilewicz, M., Winiewski, M., & Kofta, M. (2011). Zagrożający spiskowcy: Zjawisko antysemityzmu w Polsce na podstawie Polskiego Sondażu Uprzedzeń 2009. In M. Bilewicz & M. Kofta (Eds.), *Wobec obcych: Zagrożenie psychologiczne a stosunki międzygrupowe* (pp. 60–73). Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

- Cała, A. (2012). *Żyd – wróg odwieczny? Antysemityzm w Polsce i jego źródła*. Nisza.
- Darnton, J. (1981, March 15). Anti-Semitism without Jews? A Polish riddle. *The New York Times*.
- Długosz, J. (2001). *Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*. Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.
- Domosławski, A. (2021). *Wygnaniec: 21 scen z życia Zygmunta Baumana*. Wielka Litera.
- Keff, B. (2013). *Antysemityzm: Niezamknięta historia*. Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca.
- Krzemiński, I. (Ed.). (2015). *Żydzi – problem prawdziwego Polaka: Antysemityzm, ksenofobia i stereotypy narodowe po raz trzeci*. Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego. <https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.9788323518105>
- Lehmann, A. (2019, November 15). *Poznańska synagoga sprzedana. Nabywcą zagraniczny inwestor*. wyborcza.pl / Poznań. <https://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/7,36001,25414150,poznańska-synagoga-została-sprzedana-nabywca-zagraniczny-inwestor.html>.
- Lendvai, P. (1971). *Anti-Semitism without Jews: Communist Eastern Europe*. Doubleday.
- Mądry, W. (2020). Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na Uniwersytecie Poznańskim w latach 1919–1939 w świetle materiałów archiwalnych. *Sprawy Narodowościowe: Seria nowa*, 2020(52), Article 2317. <https://doi.org/10.11649/sn.2317>
- Mazowiecki, T. (2017). The anti-Semitism of kind and gentle people (A. Marczyk, Trans.). In A. Michnik & A. Marczyk (Eds.), *Against anti-Semitism: An anthology of twentieth-century Polish writings* (pp. 170–187). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1960).
- Roszak, J. (2015). *Słyszysz? Synagoga, Wychodząc spod poznańskiej synagogi przy Wronieckiej*. Instytut Sławistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk (Sławistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy); Ośrodek "Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN".
- Smykowski, M., & Wosińska, M. (2012). Przywracanie pamięci. Projekt Stadion. *Miasteczko Poznań*, 2012(1), 21–25.
- Sobańska, A., & Wojciechowska, M. (2012). Z widokiem na Stadion. Wojenna historia Poznania w relacjach mieszkańców Wildy. *Miasteczko Poznań*, 2012(1), 36–42.
- Szostak, V. (2020, June 7). *Uniwersytet w Poznaniu zbadał historię własnego antysemityzmu. Ani jednego profesora Żyda*. wyborcza.pl / Poznań. <https://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/7,105531,25995222,uniwersytet-w-poznaniu-zbadal-historie-wlasnego-antysemityzmu.html>
- Tokarska-Bakir, J. (2008). *Legends o krwi: Antropologia przesądu*. Wydawnictwo W. A. B.
- Witkowski, R. (2012). *Żydzi w Poznaniu: Krótki przewodnik po historii i zabytkach*. Wydawnictwo Miejskie Poznań.
- Zaręba Bielawski, M. (2018). *Dom z dwiema wieżami*. Karakter.

Antysemityzm rozszerzony: na przykładzie Poznania

Abstrakt

Autorka bada współczesny antysemityzm w Poznaniu. W pierwszej części opracowania rekonstruuje, jak kształtowała się współczesna pamięć zbiorowa w tym polskim mieście, poczynając od okresu międzywojennego. Następnie, odwołując się do kontekstów, wskazuje na dominujący w Poznaniu mit założycielski średniowiecznej legendy o skradzionych hostiach. Omawia też historię antysemityzmu na Uniwersytecie im. Adama Mickiewicza. W ostatnich latach uczelnia ujawnia źródła archiwalne, w tym materiały związane z tworzeniem getta ławkowego i z wprowadzeniem *numerus clausus*; w ten sposób stara się niejako zadośćuczynić haniebnym wydarzeniom ze swojej historii. Zastanawiając się nad antysemityzmem w Poznaniu, autorka zadaje pytanie, czym napędza się on dziś w niemal monoetnicznym mieście. Wprowadza pojęcie rozszerzonego antysemityzmu. Na potrzeby artykułu przeprowadziła wywiady metodą delficką z badaczami i społecznikami.

Słowa kluczowe: antysemityzm w Poznaniu; rozszerzony antysemityzm; post-pamięć; metoda delficka

Citation

Roszak, J. (2021). Extended antisemitism: The case of Poznań. *Sprawy Narodowościowe: Seria nowa*, 2021(53), Article 2616. <https://doi.org/10.11649/sn2616>